

newsworthy trends

Justice For All—At A Price More Can Afford

(NAPSA)—Because access to the legal system shouldn't be beyond your means, a new website delivers a chance at justice that is easier to afford.

For many people affected by the recession, who have been laid off or are experiencing some other form of economic turmoil, hiring a lawyer at the going rate is not possible.

With legal fees averaging \$300 per hour, a family struggling through a foreclosure or experiencing other financial woes often has to do without any form of legal representation.

Although they might be strapped for cash, many families in this type of situation may not qualify for legal aid. And it's not just individuals who find themselves in difficulty; small businesses and startups often need legal help.

At a recent speech at the American Constitution Society, Laurence Tribe, head of the U.S. Justice Department's Access to Justice Initiative, called Americans' access to justice a "dramatically understated" crisis. The problem is growing for the middle class.

Fortunately, a new online legal marketplace, Shpoonkle.com, offers a more affordable alternative. With the slogan "Justice You Can Afford," the site offers a remedy for those who don't qualify for legal aid and can't afford high hourly legal rates and contingency fees.



Caught between the need for legal services and \$300-per-hour fees, many middle-class families and small-business owners are searching for affordable alternatives.

A recent survey shows clients are paying lawyers—who compete for casework in a reverse auction—an average fee of \$207 an hour, or 27 percent less than the \$284 national average calculated by Lawyers.com. The same survey also reveals that attorneys found on the new site are accepting contingency fees below the industry standard of one-third of any future settlement.

"Our goal is to make attorneys' fees more reasonable and we are succeeding," said Robert Grant Niznik, Shpoonkle's founder and

CEO. "While it is still expensive to hire a lawyer, a savings of nearly \$80 an hour can make the difference between having representation or none at all."

The site works by having lawyers and law firms place bids on requests for legal work posted by potential clients.

In standard auctions, people bid against one another, forcing prices up so that the highest bid wins. But in reverse auctions, prices are driven down by individuals bidding to win at the lowest price.

For example, a small-business owner or someone needing a legal document, such as a contract or a will, can fill out an online questionnaire and post it on the site. Interested lawyers then place bids by specifying the lowest fee they would charge for that service. The process is completely confidential and the listing is free.

"In our society, the middle class is often left vulnerable without a lawyer; this site helps give it the opportunity to have proper representation," said Niznik.

So that as many people as possible can benefit from the site's promise of lower legal costs, the site has been translated into Russian, French, Italian, Chinese, Spanish and German.

For more information, visit www.shpoonkle.com or e-mail info@shpoonkle.com.